



The End of the Road

Primary Data



Contact Shelter SA
sheltersa@sheltersa.asn.au
(08)8223 4077

The End of the Road

"Any society, any nation, is judged on the basis of how it treats its weakest members -- the last, the least, the littlest." Cardinal Roger Mahony (1998)

Introduction

Australia is experiencing a housing affordability crisis. People who are living on low incomes are paying more than 30% of their income on housing costs, termed "housing stress". There are less people purchasing homes and at retirement age, fewer home purchasers who have paid off their mortgage. The sell-off of public housing and housing affordability problems are causing more and more South Australians to experience periods of homelessness with no relief in sight. The Federal Government does not currently have a housing strategy and situates housing in a welfare paradigm, evidenced by its position in the Social Services Portfolio.

Housing stress causes hardship for people and families living on low incomes who must sacrifice other necessities to pay for their housing including food, health services, medicines, transport and clothing. Our vulnerable citizens face additional barriers to securing an affordable, safe place to call home. Often referred to as boarding houses, the Residential Tenancies Act SA (RTA)(1995) defines a rooming house as, "a residential premises in which rooms are available, on a commercial basis, for residential occupation; and accommodation is available for at least three persons". Rooming houses are often referred to as accommodation of the last resort where some of our most vulnerable citizens are being left to a life without the services they need and assistance to move into a home that is more affordable, private and safe than a rooming house. This research into rooming houses is the first methodical study of the South Australian rooming house sector since 2003.

The Shelter SA report and recommendations are available [here](#). This paper contains the primary data, its analysis and discussion. The first section of this paper will outline the aims of the research, the methods used and participant demographics. The appendices contain the survey and focus group methods and the body of the paper contains six sections as follows:

- Section 1 – Resident Survey Results
- Section 2 – Landlord Survey Results
- Section 3 – Landlord Focus Group Results
- Section 4 – Community Service Provider Focus Group Results
- Section 5 – Discussion
- Section 6 – Conclusion

Aims

The aim of this research is to hear directly from people living in rooming housing and the landlords, owners, managers and community service providers that work in the sector and for policy-makers,

government and the community to hear their voices. The term “landlords” describes people who own and/or manage rooming houses. The Residential Tenancy Act SA (1995) is the framework for the collection of primary data and questions were formed directly related to the rights and responsibilities of residents and landlords. The focus groups more deeply explore the experiences, attitudes and opinions of landlords and community service providers to inform the advocacy work of Shelter SA, the opportunities and challenges created by systems and policy that affect the rooming house sector and ideas for improvement.

Methods

Primary data collection occurred via two methods – surveys based on the rights and responsibilities of residents and landlords as are outlined in the Residential Tenancies Act (SA) 1995 and focus groups.

Eight hundred hard copies of the resident survey went to community service providers who refer and support clients to rooming houses to pass on to their clients with a reply paid, self-addressed envelope for each survey to ensure resident privacy and confidentiality in returning the survey to Shelter SA. An identical Survey Monkey was created on line to maximise the opportunities for rooming house residents to participate. Several surveys and envelopes were handed to residents of a rooming house in person by Shelter SA staff who were invited to visit a rooming house and utilised this opportunity to invite the residents to a focus group. Unfortunately, no residents attended the planned focus group. The resident survey appears as Appendix 1.

Landlords received the landlord surveys via Australia post or email. Landlord names and addresses are recorded on an informal “Boarding House List” that is held by Shelter SA, some community service providers and available at some Housing SA offices. Landlord surveys with reply paid, self-addressed envelopes were distributed to ensure that participant privacy and confidentiality was maintained. The landlord survey is available at Appendix 2. Invitations were sent to the Shelter SA mailing list subscribers with a link to the surveys and focus groups via email (approximately 1,000 individuals and organisations) and shared using social media.

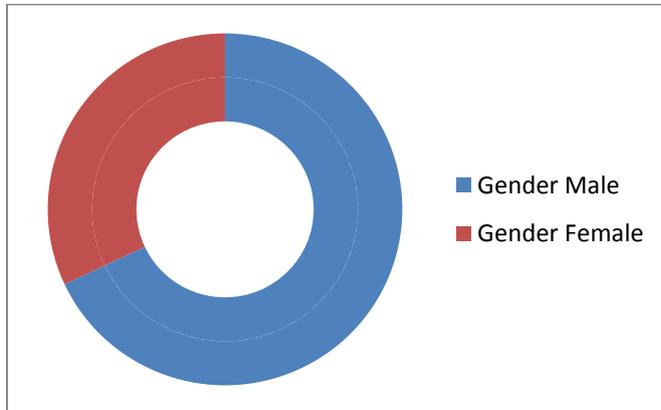
Two focus groups enabled the gathering of rich qualitative data from the perspectives of landlords and community service providers. Invitations were extended to attend the focus groups to the same landlords and community service providers as described in the above paragraph and more widely through the Shelter SA mailing list. The focus group discussion topics and questions appear as Appendix 3 – Landlord Focus Group as Appendix 4.

A number of rooming house residents were personally invited to a focus group at Shelter SA and approximately five people expressed interest in attending. Unfortunately, between the time that contact was made and the actual day, each person was unable to attend or changed their mind about attending and the resident focus group did not proceed. One of the potential participants said that he was “in trouble” and could not attend and another had been evicted from his rooming house.

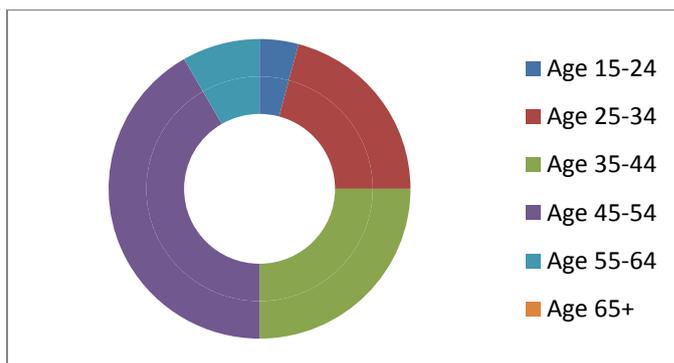
Survey Respondent Demographics - Residents

1. Number of respondents = 25

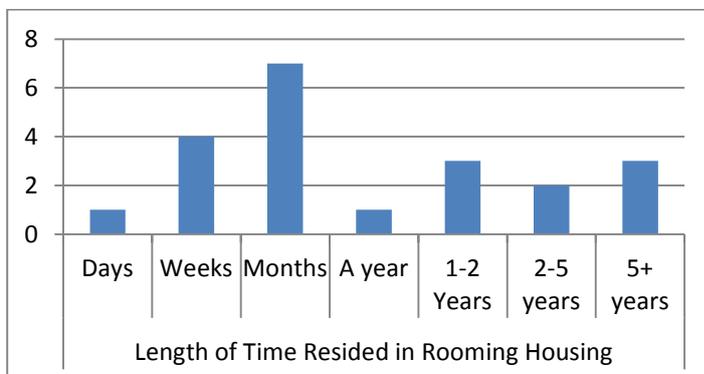
2. Resident survey respondents gender – majority of respondents were male



3. Resident Survey Respondent Age Groups – majority of respondents aged between 45– 54 years



4. Resident Survey Respondent Length of Time Living in Rooming Houses – 13 respondents had lived in rooming housing for one year or less and 9 respondents had lived in rooming housing for between 1 and 5+ years.

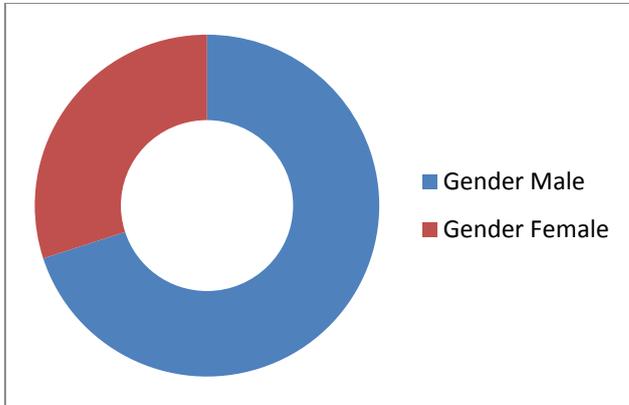


5. Voting - 64% of Respondents were enrolled to vote and 36% were not however only 55% of respondents voted in the Federal Election and 45% did not vote.

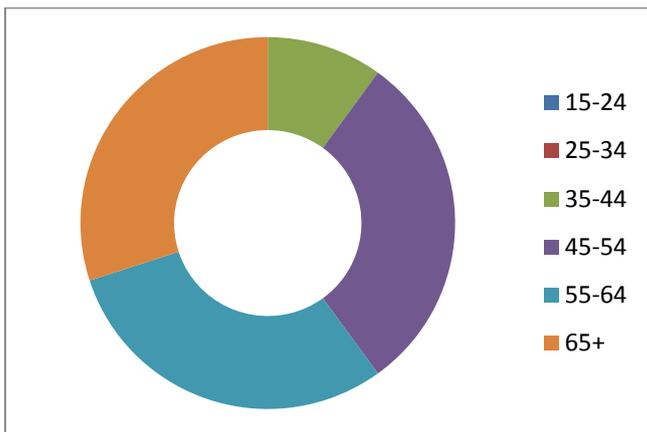
Survey Respondent Demographics - Landlords

1. **Number of landlord respondents** = 10

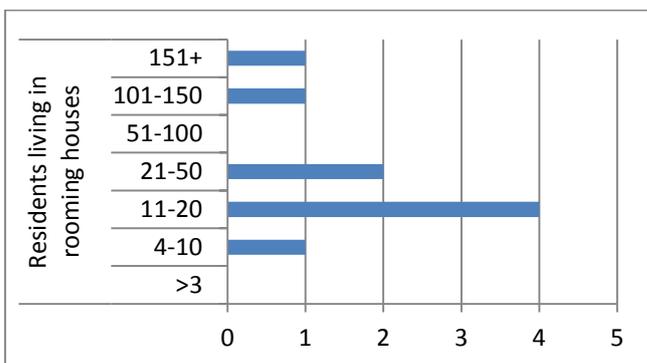
2. **Landlord respondents gender** – The majority of respondents were male.



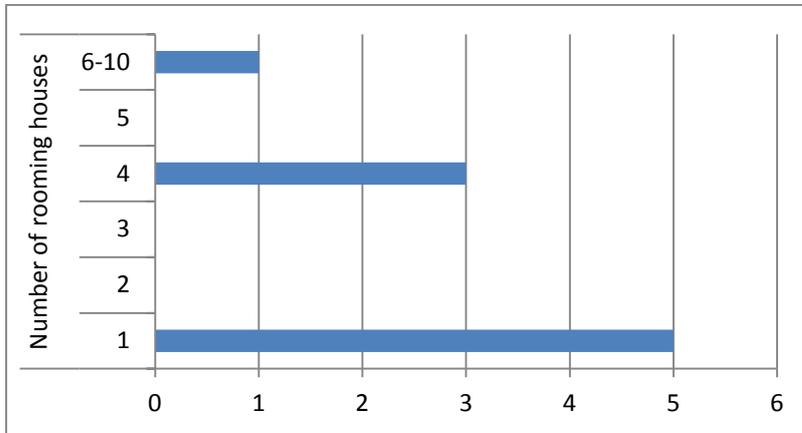
3. **Landlord survey respondent age group** – The majority of respondents were older people, with approximately one quarter at or above retirement age of 65 years.



4. **Total number of residents housed in rooming houses you own/manage** – Four respondents house between 11 and 20 residents, two respondents house between 21 and 50 residents, with single respondents housing 151+ residents, 101-150 residents and 4-10 residents respectively. If the maximum number of residents in each grouping is assumed, respondents potentially house 490 residents.

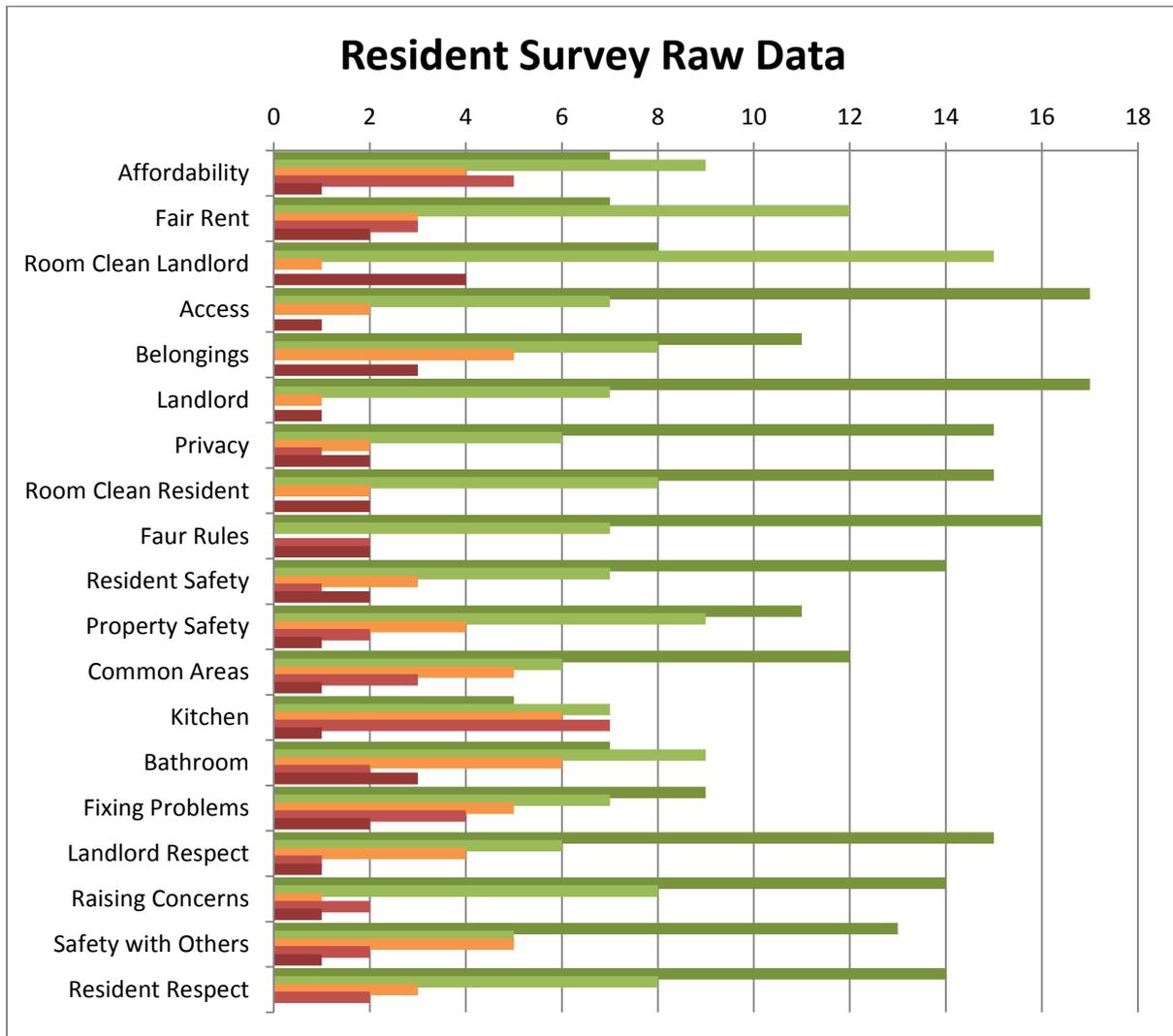


5. **Total number of rooming houses you own/manage** - One respondent owned/managed between 6 and 10 rooming houses, three respondents owned/managed four rooming houses and five respondents owned/managed one rooming house.



Results

Section 1: Resident Survey Results



Green = Positive
Orange = Neutral
Red = Negative

Resident Survey Results

Responses to 19 questions using a 1-5 scale of strongly agree/strongly disagree

#	Question	Agreed Response %
1.	My rent is affordable	61%
2.	My rent is fair	70%
3.	My room was clean when I moved in	82%
4.	I have easy access to my room	89%
5.	My belongings are safe in my room	70%
6.	The landlord is respectful when they enter my room	92%
7.	I have privacy in my room	80%
8.	I keep my room clean	85%
9.	The house rules are fair	85%
10.	The house rules enhance the safety of residents	77%
11.	The house rules enhance the safety of the property	74%
12.	The common areas are well maintained	66%
13.	The kitchen appliances are well maintained	46%
14.	The bathroom is well maintained	55%
15.	If I report a problem, the landlord will fix the issue quickly	59%
16.	My landlord respects me	77%
17.	I feel comfortable raising concerns about the boarding/rooming house with my landlord	84%
18.	I feel safe around other residents	69%
19.	Other residents treat me with respect	81%

Resident Open Text Survey Responses

House rules I like:

1. Do your own dishes and keep the kitchen clean.
2. No smoking in house, except everyone does and landlord can't (I believe) do anything about it.
3. Not having anyone stay over.
4. No abusive behaviour. No threats of assault mentally or physically. No disrupting the peace. No denying of anyone's rights. Clean up after yourself. Follow HCCP hygiene food standards. The police are always welcome.
5. No smoking.
6. Clean up after yourself.
7. Clean your own mess and not a lot of visitors.
8. Doing your own dishes, own washing and own food.
9. All and to smoke weed everyday.
10. All and especially allowed to smoke medical cannabis everyday.
11. Clean up yourself and that people are nice and respect each other.
12. The written rules by the landlord are clear and fair as they apply equally to all tenants and are for our safety and living environment.

House rules I don't like:

1. No smoking indoors.
2. Denying people their lawful and human rights and preventing police from entering. Extra non-specified pest agreement charges.
3. Dishes.
4. I can't have my motorbike in my room – lol
5. Sometimes tenants bend the rules but the rules are fair and equally applied.

Comments about things you like/dislike about your accommodation:

1. The landlord is a miserable old c**t.
2. Other people live with tenants and the landlord doesn't do anything – 6 people in a 5 bedroom house – too loud, you can't relax.
3. None of the proprietors or landlords are licenced and back ground checked by police. The houses are not check to meet Australian standards.
4. The landlord leaves it months before replacing an appliance that needs replacing (e.g. kettle, door, oven – nearly a year) yet still takes all of our rent on time or charges for extra electrical expenses, this isn't fair.
5. House owner very helpful. Most people in the house are friendly and helpful.
6. Need to be more places for the homeless and get kids off the street.
7. It's awesome!
8. I have my keys to the house and I have been there for 5 weeks and I have to wait for people to come home so I get it (??).
9. My primary concern is for peace of mind and safety. At times tenants smoke up large creating smog like in Beijing when coal factories burn at capacity. Unfortunately my health is at risk due to "unknown" toxins in the smog and police investigating the cause. Visitors are in and out on drug related runs and things can become quite scary.

Discussion of Resident Survey Results

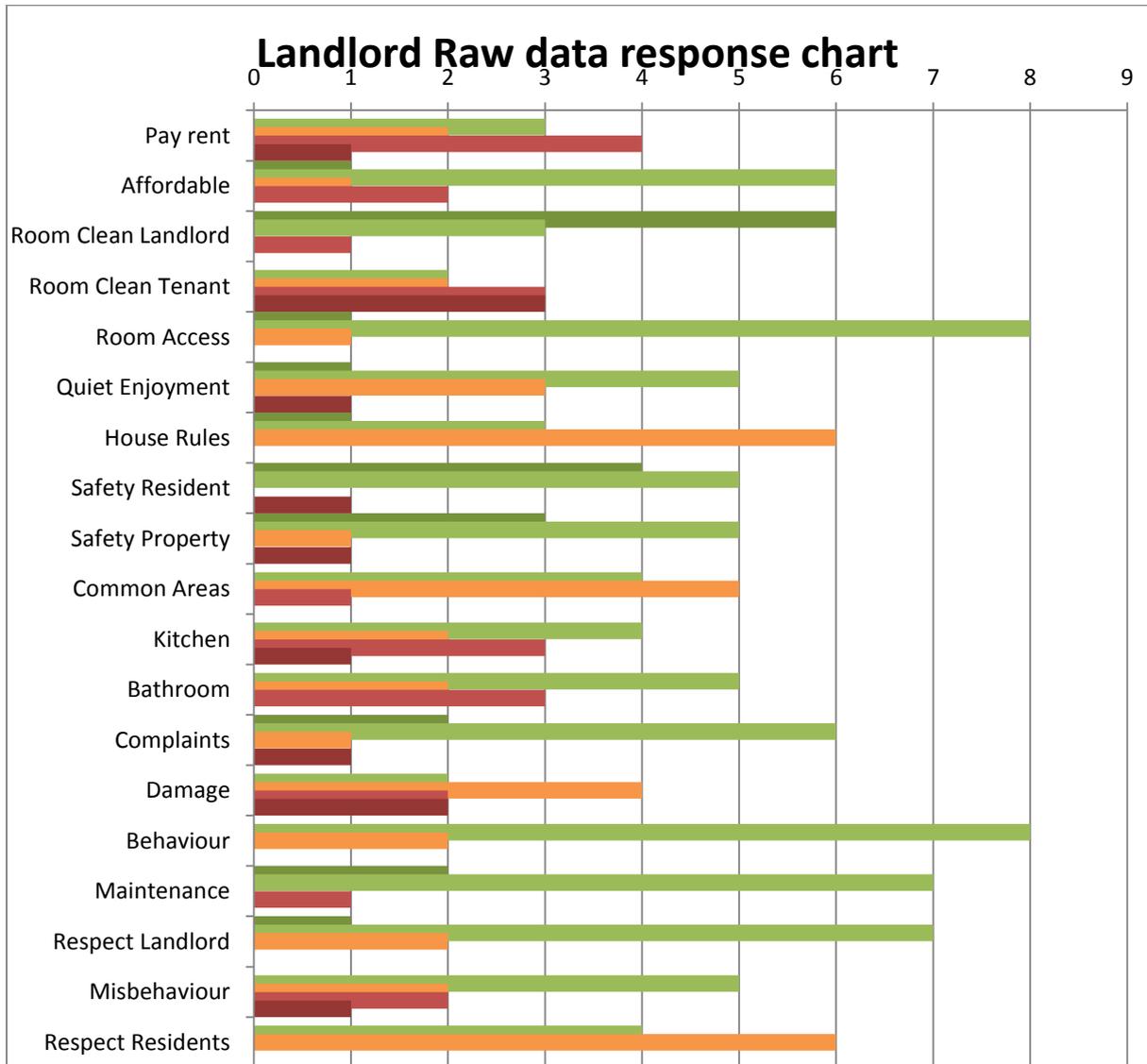
Responses to the 19 questions based on legal resident rights and responsibilities are predominantly positive and this is an encouraging finding however, there is a worrying level of neutral and negative responses. Shelter SA understands that there are rooming houses that operate well and afford some quality of life and affordability for residents.

Satisfaction survey methodology, especially from the health services sector, informs us that people who are satisfied with services are more likely to be willing to participate in survey research and provide positive feedback. Health service providers have long recognised that when this phenomenon occurs, it is difficult for them to know how to approach their service improvement work. Another issue that affects satisfaction survey work is the presence of vulnerable clients, patients and customers who are less likely to complain, are less likely to understand their rights and responsibilities and are therefore often-silent recipients of services. It is acknowledged that these methodological issues do not detract from the positive responses to the first 19 questions in the resident survey.

The open text answers about house rules and general comments contain positives however, provide more insight into some of the issues that residents find challenging because they are sharing accommodation with others and include the use of illegal drugs, preventing entry by police, affordability and extra charges, maintenance problems, overcrowding, no keys and an overall lack of regulation.

The acceptance of house rules as a “necessary evil” may show that residents have given up on some of the rights that many people take for granted in where they live, such as having family and friends visit, privacy, amenity, security of tenure, safety, maintenance and affordability. As accommodation of the last resort, rooming housing is not a real “choice” that vulnerable people make and it seems that because of how they experience their accommodation, they do not feel they have access to their legal rights.

Section 2: Landlord Survey Results



Green = Positive
 Orange = Neutral
 Red = Negative

Landlord Survey Results

Responses to 19 questions using a 1-5 scale of strongly agree/strongly disagree

	Question	Agreed Response %
1.	My residents pay rent on time	30%
2.	My residents can afford their rent	70%
3.	Rooms are at an appropriate standard when residents move in	90%
4.	Residents keep their room clean	70%
5.	Residents allow me to access their room when necessary	90%
6.	Residents enjoy their rooms quietly and respectfully	60%
7.	Residents adhere to house rules well	40%
8.	House rules enhance the safety of residents	90%
9.	House rules enhance the safety of the property	80%
10.	Residents maintain common rooms well	40%
11.	Residents maintain the kitchen and kitchen appliances well	40%
12.	Residents maintain the bathroom well	50%
13.	Residents feel comfortable reporting issues with common areas to me	80%
14.	Residents deliberately damage common property	20%
15.	Residents are generally well behaved	80%
16.	I have an open dialogue with residents in regards to maintenance issues with the property	90%
17.	Residents treat me with respect	80%
18.	I am rarely concerned about residents misbehaving	50%
19.	Residents treat each other with respect	40%

Landlord Open Text Survey Responses

House rules I like:

1. You must not cause or permit an interference with the reasonable peace/comfort/privacy of other residents. All residents respect protecting my property. All respect no bullying/intimidation/threats or harassment.
2. Pay rent on time.
3. All house rules by tenants.
4. No drugs or alcohol on site and no overnight guests.

House rules I implement that help residents or that residents like:

1. Never enter roommate's bedrooms without permission. All respect no bullying etc. Lights, heaters, radiators, air conditioners to be turned off. No visitors staying overnight and not allowed showering etc.
2. Respect other fellow residents quiet enjoyment of life. Live in harmony with each other and respect.

Role of boarding/rooming housing:

1. Low cost housing to provide shelter/safety and in a residency that is well looked after.
2. Provide basic accommodation to deserving adults.
3. Affordable housing for low income earners.

Changes you'd like to see to rooming/boarding house system:

1. Larger bonds as the bad tenants damage and not pay rent so I am out of pocket in this situation. E.g. last window repair cost \$420 and bond is \$320.
2. Bond – if you want landlord to take on Housing SA clients – should make same as renting own house/unit.
3. I would like some support from the government so that I can improve the property for the residents to enjoy and may be help keep the rent down as low as I can.
4. Return provision for bonds as was previously. Present guarantee too cumbersome, too slow and too unreliable.
5. Clarity with SACAT processes.

Other comments:

1. When kicking out tenants and they don't have anywhere else to go it is scary. They can be quite upset and sometimes I have rung for police support. They never seem ready to help and they don't always understand the issues. I had one refuse to help. They need to be more aware of the rules i.e. 16 days unpaid rent = out etc. There seems to be no support or proper advice – even the tenancy board.
2. My residents all respect me and we get on well. Apart from the ones that run out owing rent, I have a good relationship with most.
3. Enable landlords to evict tenants within days instead taking 4 weeks and over with present system, living free in short period.

Discussion of Landlord Survey Results

The landlord survey responses are also predominantly positive however, there are a number of negatives from the landlord perspective, including residents paying their rent on time, which is clearly a big issue for landlords who are running a business and residents who might have difficulties in catching up rent arrears. Other negatives included the cleanliness of rooms and common areas by residents, adherence to house rules, damages and a lack of respect between residents.

Open text responses indicate that house rules are a positive for landlord participants and the way in which they aim to influence the behaviour of residents. It is understandable that accommodation for multiple tenants must have some basic agreement by residents to behave in ways that do not upset or distress others. The rooming house sector however, has evolved into one that cares for highly vulnerable people is not equipped to approach this task in a way that is fair and equitable, and does not restrict the legal or human rights of residents. From a human rights perspective, many of the rules are too prescriptive and limit the freedom and right to privacy, peace and quiet enjoyment of leased accommodation.

Landlord respondents clearly see the role of providing accommodation as one of community service catering for people living on low incomes who are “deserving” adults.

Landlord participants made suggestions for improvements to the sector in which they operate including the financial burden of resident damages, the payment of bonds, rent arrears, changes to SACAT and are looking to government for increased support, given that they are providing what they consider a community service.

Section 3: Landlord Focus Group Results

Landlord Focus Group (Rooming House Owners and Managers n = 6)

A community service

Landlord participants talked about the rental affordability their properties can provide to people living on low incomes and saw the provision of rooming housing as a service. One participant said that Housing SA should commit funds to replenishing rooming house stock because they are providing a service to the community. Participants talked about “helping people in the community” by providing rooming housing.

Participants shared what they see as the primary reason that residents stay in rooming houses is due to having “nowhere else to stay” and see rooming housing as only a temporary solution that they can access quickly. Participants agreed that the majority of the residents they house are “vulnerable, sick and/or on welfare”.

Housing SA Bond system

The Housing SA bond process was the number one issue that concerned the participants and they reported some landlords who will not accept them, because of the administrative burden they can create. One participant said that [Housing SA] bonds “take too much time and the [amount of] paper work is ridiculous”. Claiming a bond is extremely difficult when residents do not want to sign any paperwork or they unexpectedly leave without notifying landlords. Participants agreed that the Housing SA bond system is not suitable for rooming house residents and one participant said, “If they [Housing SA] want us to keep doing this it [the bond process] must change”. Another participant said, “If the bond system does not change, rooming houses will close down and the State will lose a service”.

Discussion occurred about several issues related to the provision of Housing SA bonds to residents. Firstly, there are problems with the debts that can accrue to residents who are simply unable to pay back the amount, and can quickly become ineligible for bond assistance because of a bond debt. Some participants said that residents have little concern about bonds being returned to them, as they do not see the bond as their own money. One participant said that “bad landlords” lead residents to believe that they will never have their bond returned regardless of how they pay their rent or manage their residency and that this ruins things for “good landlords”. Another view was that there are “bad landlords” who never give bonds back regardless of resident circumstances and that “good landlords” then suffer.

House rules

Participants talked about house rules, particularly the rule about no visitors. Predominantly there are “no visitor” rules in the rooming houses represented however, one landlord said that they do not have that rule but may implement it in the future, another commented that family members are allowed to visit residents. The reasons given by participants for the “no visitors rule” were to keep drug dealers out, to stop non-residents from using the rooming house for showers, toilet and food or kitchen and to prevent disruption to the household. One participant talked about closed circuit television cameras in the common areas of the rooming houses to record the comings and goings

from the premises, to ensure there were no visitors. Another participant said that residents should have a basics card rather than money, to restrict their purchases of alcohol and drugs and restrict them from “spending cash recklessly”.

Responsibility for vulnerable citizens

One participant suggested that the government should contribute financially to the redevelopment of rooming houses if they are serious about helping the “least advantaged people in society”. The discussion around who takes responsibility for vulnerable people and suggested solutions about government policy indicates that implicitly, participants understand that health, mental health and housing services provided by State Government should be responsible for the safety and wellbeing of their residents but service delivery and policy are falling short of meeting community expectations.

Participants agreed that some social workers simply “handball” their clients to them and can pressure them to accept residents, who in reality are not ready to be released from hospital due to mental and physical health issues. Participants said that some health providers pay bond and rent in advance for their patients in order to move them out of the service. The participants said that they are the “ultimate coalface” when it comes to people with high and complex needs.

All participants agreed that their residents would benefit from better communication and collaboration between themselves and social workers. Participants said that they did not think social workers understand their role and expect them to take over many of the worker responsibilities, for which they are not trained and do not want – they are above and beyond the responsibilities a landlord should have. One participant said that each party, social worker and landlord, are stretched to the limit, causing the interconnectedness that leads to effective service delivery to break down drastically, causing negative outcomes for the residents. Another participant said that the first step to improve relationships and therefore services, is to rebuild trust.

SACAT

Participants talked about the difficulties they face when claiming resident bonds. If a resident disputes the bond claim, landlords must pay a fee to lodge an application with the South Australian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (SACAT). The cost of the application can be approximately half of the total bond amount. Participants talked about the cost of their time to come to the city and pay for parking, in addition to the application, means that it is hardly worth their while to claim a bond. Participants said that SACAT are “rotten to landlords” and do not treat them with respect. One participant gave an example of a resident who started a fire, broke windows and “trashed the place” and their bond claim application was refused. Participants said that ultimately, bonds do not cover damages and SACAT processes are too slow, negatively affecting their cash flow.

Participants discussed rooming house legislation and were clear that the current laws are completely unsuitable for their residents. The legislation is inflexible when it comes to the short term, transient resident population and “is not helpful” to landlords.

Pseudo health, mental health and housing policy

Participants agreed that many of their residents are living with mental health issues and it was a problem because “one bad egg can destroy a positive resident environment”. Participants talked about the use of rooming houses as a way of discharging patients from health institutions, often before they were ready to live independently. Participants mentioned the “hospital avoidance funds” that represent health institutions, including hospitals, paying bonds and rent in advance for patients who do not have anywhere to live. Participants said that they are often told the person has a mental health worker, but then they discover there is no worker assigned to the resident, one participant asked, “Who are the mental health workers?” adding that there is a breakdown in communication and trust between mental health workers and rooming house landlords. A suggestion was that landlords should receive a written report from mental health workers prior to residents moving in.

Section 4: Community Service Provider Focus Group n = 8

Right to care and support

One participant talked about the use of the word “resident” – the description given to individuals living in rooming houses that reflects the language in the rooming house legislation and outlines their legal status. Another participant explained that when an individual has previously been a client within the mental health system or a patient within the health system and suddenly loses that status to become a “resident” they are excluded from multiple supports. The participant said, “Because when you are a resident you do not have the same rights and access to care and support, in part because you are deemed to be “housed””.

Pseudo health and housing policy

All participants called for a system that ensures residents can remain linked to health and community services – living in a rooming house does not mean that you stop being a client or a patient in need of care. Participants said that there are very high levels of mental health issues, drug and alcohol misuse and other behavioural and social issues that are strong barriers to being “ready for private rental”. Participants said that they repeatedly see clients leaving health institutions without a discharge plan and no supports in place. Participants were of the view that many people leave hospital before they are ready or able to look after themselves properly. Participants agreed that it is imperative for people living in rooming houses to have strong links to the services they need, one participant said, “Its simple”, but it does not happen.

Preferred modal

All participants wanted to see more rooming houses operated by not for profit, community organisations with a higher level of amenity and private bathrooms and kitchens in self-contained units. Participants talked about residents being trapped in the rooming house sector and that “very rarely do people move into private rental, I’d struggle to find one person”. Another participant said that 0% of residents transition to alternative housing and that, “they [residents] run out of hope that they can move on”.

Lack of regulation and licensing

Participants were aware of both good and bad rooming houses. One participant said that there are some rooming houses where “you know it’s not the best, and you know it won’t end well”. The lack of regulation is a major contributing factor to the bad rooming houses. Bad rooming houses are places where the physical conditions of the buildings are poor, unreasonable and unsafe and/or there are landlords that use “stand-over tactics” on residents or bully residents. There are good rooming houses where people can access support, there are helpful staff and a real sense of community amongst residents. One participant said that good rooming houses mean that residents don not feel as though they are “stuck in a bubble”. Another participant said, “People need opportunities beyond walls”. All Participants called for more not for profit rooming houses.

Affordability and vulnerability

One participant said that over the last year they have seen a dramatic increase in the need for affordable accommodation for all client cohorts. Rooming houses are the only affordable option for many of the single clients participants work with. Some participants expressed the view that the 85% of the residents' income is a high price to pay for rooming housing and there is no guarantee that this provided any quality of accommodation. Participants said that landlords are increasingly refusing certain clients because demand is so high they can choose whom they will take and whom they will not. One participant said that they know of a landlord that will only accept people receiving Disability Support Pensions as this is a higher amount than Newstart, and they can charge more rent. Another participant said that some landlords are beginning to turn away the most vulnerable people. Participant quotes include the following:

- Rooming houses used to be the last resort ... now some people cannot even access that.
- There are no housing options after rooming houses.
- Backpackers, cheap motels, then its Vinnies, Catherine House but they're always full. Prison maybe?
- We are currently trying to strike deals with backpackers in the area.
- There is a lack of responsive housing.

Some participants were particularly concerned about the lack of affordable accommodation for the families they work with, who cannot be housed in rooming houses, there are no other alternatives. Participants said that when a person enters the service system and is experiencing homelessness, if they are placed in a motel, they are still considered homeless and remain a priority for public or community housing however, if they are placed in a rooming house, they are considered to be housed and therefore not a priority category. One participant said, "Single males won't get motel accommodation, they will be put up in rooming houses, be classified as housed, and will be forgotten". Another participant said, "Government should not be relying on this [type of housing], this is a way for Government to hide the problem".

Systemic Failure

Participants agreed that rooming house legislation, systems, policies and procedures are failing vulnerable people and that rooming housing is unsafe and inappropriate for many people and presents a complex inconsistency with other crisis accommodation solutions. Increasingly, participants reported that clients are coming directly to their agencies from hospitals or prison with no money, nowhere to stay and no care plans. Participants said that the legislation does not protect residents from sub-standard buildings and rooms are inadequate. One participant used the term "sheds for beds" to demonstrate the poor standards of some rooming houses and another said, "Its like incarceration, they'd have a better lifestyle in prison". Often there is no heating or cooling and some rooms do not have windows to allow fresh air to circulate in the room. Participants cited various safety issues that they have seen including unsafe stairs, faulty electrical wiring and leaking rooves.

Rights and responsibilities information and education

Participants discussed resident rights as outlined in the rooming house legislation. Participants agreed that their clients do not know their rights and one participant said, “Their rights are not enforced by anyone” and “they do not know who to complain to”. Another participant said, “Clients don’t know their rights and that’s where it starts”. Participants also struggled to identify resident rights and responsibilities.

Housing SA bond system

Participants said that it is “easy for a landlord to claim a bond” but difficult for a vulnerable person to dispute and that they are concerned about the levels of debt incurred by their clients if it results in not being eligible for future assistance. Housing SA will only assist a person financially with bond and rent when they deem rent is affordable according to the person’s income. There is a cap on the rent a Newstart recipient can be charged. Participants said that some landlords charge a utility fee in addition to the rent so that they can extract the maximum amount from their residents.

House rules

Participants discussed some of the house rules they have observed including the following:

- Can’t bring your kids in
- Can’t bring visitors or guests
- Can’t have heaters in winter
- No pets, which are a massive support to people and sometimes their only support
- Most rules are fairly basic
- In terms of house rules, while most won’t know explicitly what their rights are, but when they get evicted they know what they did

Ageing

Participants said that landlords tend to see older people as safer or less troublesome residents however beyond a certain age, health and incontinence issues become a concern for landlords and one participant cited an instance of a 93 year old being rejected from several rooming houses. Participants were of the view that residents see the onset of dementia as a real risk of eviction, as is the presence of mental health issues such as schizophrenia. Also noted as a real problem is the allocation of upstairs rooms to older residents if there are physical barriers to climbing stairs.

Problems

Consistently raised by participants was the maintenance of common areas, kitchens, bathrooms and toilets kept at poor standards and that many residents do not know about their legal rights and responsibilities. Participants reported overcrowding and very small spaces, with one person saying he knew of a rooming house where there were six residents and only two bedrooms. One participant said that they were concerned that some landlords still ask for cash bonds.

Positives

Even though the participants' focus was on negative issues affecting rooming house residents, they did express that there are some clients who really enjoy living in their rooming house. The reasons given by participants clients enjoying their accommodation were affordability, "it is what they know", they enjoy a sense of community and having people around them and they are comfortable and living near services, shops and transport. Other positive comments included house rules as boundaries that "work" for people to keep them safe when they are living with others.

The "end of the line"

One participant talked about an 80 year old male who had lived in rooming houses for thirty years highlighting the way people are trapped within the sector. Participants agreed that residents, especially older people, saw the rooming house as the end of their housing journey with little chance of mobility to better and more independent accommodation and several of those saw their next step as a nursing home. Some participants said that there is no "next step" for their clients living in rooming housing they are just living "in limbo," and "they don't feel as if they will ever live independently again". Participants said that it is more difficult for clients to secure support and work on their "issues" living in rooming housing.

Preferred housing options

Social housing is seen as more conducive to the vulnerability issues facing many residents and it was widely expressed by participants that the broader private rental market is not suitable because of affordability and location issues as well as no security of tenure. Participants said that rooming houses run by not for profit sector agencies are the next best response after social housing in terms of an appropriate model to house vulnerable people. Participants agreed there is a dire need for rooming houses for women.

A sector in decline?

Participants said that the number of rooming house options has greatly reduced over the years especially in or near the city, perhaps showing a sector in decline.

Section 5 - Discussion

The Shelter SA literature review informs us that the majority of rooming house residents are unemployed and live with mental and physical health issues. The primary data collected for this study confirms that rooming house residents are vulnerable in terms of their health and mental health. Vulnerable citizens are living with circumstances that mean they are unable to participate economically in society and are unlikely to secure and maintain employment. It is encouraging that 64% of resident survey respondents are enrolled to vote, even though only 55% voted in the last Federal election however, they do not have a voice when it comes to having choice and control over their housing options, privacy and affordability, nor their access to services. They are “forced” to interact and cohabitate with other residents, share basic amenities such as bathrooms and kitchens, and may not have any living space other than their bedroom. A congregate accommodation model is not one that is desirable as a long-term accommodation option and does not meet current community expectations about housing. Intellectual disability and physical disability sectors and services have long realised that residents want and need to live in homes just like everyone else and strongly value their privacy, choice and independence.

The supply of public housing does not adequately meet supply. Affordability locks people living on low incomes out of the private rental market and home ownership is impossible. The cost of institutional accommodation is high when compared to the cost of public housing and it is difficult to understand the logic applied by governments who appear to aim to save the taxpayer money. Commonwealth Rent Assistance and the provision of government bonds and rent in advance are critical to assist people living on low incomes access private rental accommodation and rooming houses however, they are a pseudo housing subsidy that is propping up the for-profit rooming house sector that is inadequate to ensure any quality of life for its recipients. Due to the insecure tenure of some rooming houses, it is very easy for residents to amass a debt to Housing SA, further adding to their disadvantage and homelessness.

Citizens who are receiving services from government and non-government organisations should not be classified as “housed” if they reside in a boarding house and should be eligible for the same level of housing, services and community support they would receive if they were homeless. Rooming house residents require extra supports to participate in society, realise their housing aspirations, live within the least restrictive environment possible and achieve recovery. Institutions must desist immediately from discharging citizens who are not ready to return to the community and who do not have an adequate discharge plan and community supports in place. Ideally, relationships with support workers and mental health case workers would commence while at the time of institutionalisation to ensure a smoother transition to the community, including a thorough assessment of their housing, health and mental health needs. The payment of bonds and rent for rooming house accommodation by non-housing government agencies must also cease as a matter of urgency as this practice forms another pseudo housing subsidy with no policy setting to guide practice.

Section 6 - Conclusion

Society is judged on how it looks after its most vulnerable citizens, those who cannot look after themselves, our children, our older people and those living with mental health issues. South Australia can no longer sit idly by and allow the relegation of a relatively small number of our most vulnerable citizens to a form of accommodation that prevents access to their human rights and an acceptable quality of life, therefore failing a moral test. It is time to create a new policy environment, adequately funded, to ensure that rooming house residents benefit from the same vulnerability status as our children and our older people who deserve our care and support.

Shelter SA has a range of activities planned around advocacy for vulnerable rooming house residents and we invite you to join us and support our work. If you have any comments, questions or feedback regarding the contents of this report, please contact Shelter SA by phone (08)8223 4077 or by email sheltersa@sheltersa.asn.au.

1 – Rooming House Resident Survey

Shelter SA Boarding House Resident Survey

Shelter SA is the peak body for housing in South Australia. Shelter SA's aim is for all South Australian's to have a safe, secure and affordable place to call home. The housing market in South Australia has become unaffordable for many low income earners. We know that it can be extremely difficult to find affordable accommodation if you are relying on a low income. Shelter SA also knows that it is incredibly difficult for people to access social housing.

With private and social housing becoming inaccessible for low income earners, Shelter SA recognises that other types of accommodation may gain prominence. Academic research points to a potential rise in boarding/rooming house accommodation. Shelter SA is therefore conducting research into the rights and responsibilities of landlords and residents.

Shelter SA would like your feedback about your boarding house experience.

The below questions are based on rights and responsibilities of landlords and residents. Please only fill out the survey if you are a boarding house resident, or have been a boarding house resident in the last 12 months.

Shelter SA will also be organising meetings with boarding house residents to discuss boarding house experiences. If you wish to be a part of that forum (there is no date set yet) please contact Shelter SA on 8223 4077, or by email at sheltersa@sheltersa.asn.au

Thank you for participating!

Once you have filled in the survey, please place it in the envelope, and then put the envelope in a red mail box. You do not need to stamp the envelope.

Gender: Age:

How long have you lived in boarding/rooming housing:

Are you enrolled to vote:

Did you vote in the last federal election:

Below are 19 questions. For each question, please circle the response on the scale that best represents your views.

1 = I strongly agree 2 = I agree. 3 = Neutral / Not sure 4 = I disagree 5 = I strongly disagree

1. My rent is affordable

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly disagree

2. My rent is fair.

1 2 3 4 5

3. My room was clean when I moved in.

1 2 3 4 5

4. I have easy access to my room.

1 2 3 4 5

5. My belongings are safe in my room.

1 2 3 4 5

6. The landlord is respectful when they enter my room.

1 2 3 4 5

7. I have privacy in my room.

1 2 3 4 5

8. I keep my room clean.

1 2 3 4 5

9. The House Rules are fair.

1 2 3 4 5

10. The House Rules enhance the safety of residents.

1 2 3 4 5

11. The House Rules enhance the safety of the property.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**

12. The common areas are well maintained.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**

13. The kitchen appliances are well maintained.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**

14. The bathroom is well maintained.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**

15. If I report a problem, the landlord will fix the issue quickly.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**

16. My landlord respects me.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**

17. I feel comfortable raising concerns about the boarding/rooming house with my landlord.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**

18. I feel safe around other residents.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**

19. Other residents treat me with respect.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**

Below, write your responses in the space provided. You can write as much or as little as you want.

What are some House Rules you like?

What are some House Rules you don't like?

Do you have any other comments about things you like/dislike about your accommodation?

Appendix 2 – Rooming House Landlord Survey

Shelter SA is the peak body for housing in South Australia. Shelter SA's aim is for all South Australian's to have a safe, secure and affordable place to call home. The housing market in South Australia has become unaffordable for many low income earners. The National Rental Affordability Index shows that it is nearly impossible to find affordable accommodation if you are relying on a low income. The unaffordable housing market is leading low income earners in South Australia being forced into housing stress, which can lead to homelessness. Shelter SA also knows that it is incredibly difficult for people to access social housing.

With private and social housing becoming inaccessible for low income earners, Shelter SA recognises that other types of accommodation may gain prominence. Academic research points to a potential rise in boarding/rooming house accommodation. Shelter SA is therefore conducting research into the rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants. The research is not purely based on issues or problems; Shelter SA is also interested in the positive elements of landlord/tenant relationships.

The below questions are based on rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants that are outlined in the Residential Tenancies Act. Please only fill out the survey if you are a landlord or a proprietor of a boarding/rooming house. Shelter SA will also be holding a boarding/rooming house landlords forum. If you wish to be a part of that forum (there is no date set yet) please contact Shelter SA on 8223 4077, or by email at sheltersa@sheltersa.asn.au

Part 1 – Details

Gender:	
Age:	
Total number of tenants living in my property/properties (does not need to be exact)?:	
How many boarding/rooming houses do you operate?:	
Do you live in the boarding/rooming house?:	
Is your boarding/rooming house operated by a community organisation?:	

Optional Question

How many of your tenants are Aboriginal people (does not need to be exact)?:	
--	--

Part 2 – Landlord/Tenant relationship

Below are 18 questions. For each question, please circle the response on the scale that best represents your views.

1 = I strongly agree 2 = I agree. 3 = Neutral / Not sure 4 = I disagree 5 = I strongly disagree

1. My tenants pay rent on time	1	2	3	4	5
2. My tenants can afford their rent.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Rooms are at an appropriate standard when tenants move in.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Tenants keep their room clean.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Tenants allow me to access their room when necessary.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Tenants enjoy their rooms quietly and respectfully.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Tenants adhere to House Rules well.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The House Rules enhance the safety of tenants.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The House Rules enhance the safety of the property.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Tenants maintain common rooms well.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Tenants maintain the kitchen and kitchen appliances well.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Tenants maintain the bathroom well.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Tenants feel comfortable reporting issues with common areas to me.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Tenants deliberately damage common property.	1	2	3	4	5
15. My tenants are generally well behaved.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I have an open dialogue with tenants in regards to maintenance issues with the property.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Tenants treat me with respect.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I am rarely concerned about tenants misbehaving.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Tenants treat each other with respect.	1	2	3	4	5

Part 3 – Open questions

Some House Rules that I like are:

Some House Rules that I implement that help tenants, or that tenants like, are:

What do I see as the role of boarding/rooming housing?

What change, or changes, would you like to see to the rooming house/boarding house system?

Other comments (particularly about the relationship between boarding/rooming house landlords and tenants):

Thank you for taking the time to be a part of our Research!

Appendix 3 - Landlord Focus Group Questions and Discussion Topics

1. What are your biggest concerns, issues and challenges in owning/managing a rooming house?
2. What are the things that work well and not so well?
3. What are some of the systems you have in place that have had a positive impact for you as a landlord, and the residents as well?
4. If you could make one change to the rooming house system or legislation what would it be?
5. Discussion about assistance to recruit resident survey respondents.

Appendix 4 – Community Service Provider Focus Group Questions and Discussion Topics

1. What are your biggest concerns, issues and challenges about your clients that reside in a rooming house?
2. What are the things that work well and not so well?
3. What are some of the systems that have a positive impact for residents?
4. If you could make one change to the rooming house system or legislation what would it be?
5. Discussion about assistance to recruit resident survey respondents.